



The Power Block, Its Annex (right) and the Gold Block.

Power Block Sold

Sale of a Helena landmark, the Power Block at Sixth and Last Chance Gulch, along with two adjoining buildings, was announced today by M. C. "Mel" Carbis of Carbis Realty who said it is believed to be one of the largest private real estate sales in Helena's history.

Actual sale price was not disclosed, but a selling price of more than \$550,000 on the three buildings involved is listed by the Lewis and Clark County Appraisal Office.

Power Block Inc., a newly formed corporation made up of Helena attorney L. V. Harris and two Butte men, Frank and James Burgess, bought the six-story Power Block, the four-story Power Block Annex on Sixth and the two-story Gold Block on Last Chance Gulch from Thomas D. Tobin.

No major changes are

planned for the buildings, Harris said, although his wife will assume management duties.

The three buildings have an assessed valuation of \$221,805 and a paid taxable valuation of \$65,560.

Harris is a partner in the law firm of Harris, Jackson and Bennett with offices in the Horsky Block diagonally opposite Power Block. The same offices handle the business affairs of the Forrest H. Anderson Co.

Dozens of stores and offices are housed in the buildings including Flory's Shoes, the D. A. Davidson Co., Western Union, The Parrott, the Rialto, the Small Business Administration, Elk River Concrete Products and the Montana Legal Services Association.

The 82-year-old Power Block was built by T. C. Power who came to Montana in 1864, es-

tablishing a chain of retail stores and a river boat line. He also built the Steamboat Block on Helena Avenue.

Power was Montana's first U. S. Senator, serving from 1880 to 1895.

Mrs. Tobin is Power's granddaughter.

The Power Block, originally named the Montana Building, has 10,000 square feet of interior space. It was built in 1889 as a "truncated triangle," using stone quarried east of Helena.

The 1893 Montana Senate met in the building.

Designed by F. E. Read, the structure is described in the book "Historic Architectural Survey" by the Helena architectural firm of Jacobson and Shope as exemplifying the "rugged Romanesque" type of architecture popularized by H. H. Richardson.

The design features a "battered base of heavy stone, and the scaling down of the masonry proportions on the upper floors."

"More than any other building this tends to establish the character of Last Chance Gulch," the architects say.

A less obvious design feature was pointed out in a 1968 article appearing in "Montana, The Magazine of Western History" by architectural historian Willard B. Robinson: the window rhythm at the corner is increased by one for each additional story. The deeply recessed fifth-story windows make a further distinctive feature.

The same design is found in Chicago's Auditorium and Marshall Field Store and in the Cheney Block in Hartford, Conn.

The interior use of heavy timber, typical of mill construction, was a first for Helena. The interior of the building also is marked by a skylighted court, 40 feet wide by 60 feet long through the entire six floors.

Robinson also sums up the effect of the building: "Evidently 19th Century architects in Helena had no profound understanding of esthetic doctrines: yet they gave commercial architecture a tactile richness and humanistic scale."

The four-story Power Block Annex on Sixth Avenue was completed in 1914 in a style somewhat similar to the Power Block.

The two-story Gold Block was built in 1929 after the "great fire" of 1928 destroyed the original four-story Gold Block. The original Gold Block was built in 1888 and housed Helena's first elevator. That elevator was equipped with mirrors, leather seats and stained glass panels. It was water-powered, requiring 140 pounds of pressure from the Eastside Water Co. reservoir, sources state.